

VZCZCXRO3704
PP RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #0329/01 0521434
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P R 211434Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6736
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 1391
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1432
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1421
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1372
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1315
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1388
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1346
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1285
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1191
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0972
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1439
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1474
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS 0765
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 7851

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 000329

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: DUSHANBE CITY GOVERNMENT FINALLY ACTS AND DEMOLISHES HALF OF ONLY REMAINING SYNAGOGUE

REF: 05 DUSHANBE 1737

DUSHANBE 00000329 001.2 OF 002

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: City authorities tore down half of Dushanbe's synagogue February 8 along with several private homes remaining in the largely cleared vicinity to build a road leading to the new Presidential Palace. The synagogue has known about this planned demolition for at least three years, but has been unable to stop it and unwilling to consider relocation (REFTEL). The synagogue's Rabbi, Mikhail Abdurahmonov, is seeking legal assistance to try post facto to reach an agreement with the government for fair compensation. We expect the story will soon go international. Anti-Semitism is not involved. The saddest part of this long-brewing story is that various international communities have not been willing to be pro-active on this issue to help the small remnant Jewish community in Dushanbe. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) A Jewish-American citizen, who has taken interest in assisting the synagogue met with PolOff February 21 to update the Embassy on recent developments. According to him, Government authorities advised the synagogue on February 7 they would begin demolition. Rabbi Mikhail Abdurahmonov staved off the demolition and asked the authorities to talk to city officials and the mayor, whom he claimed promised him they would not tear down the synagogue. (COMMENT: In fact, to the best of our knowledge, the mayor never made this promise, although he did promise to relocate the synagogue and community center. For various reasons, the rabbi never accepted this offer, and insisted the synagogue would never move. END COMMENT.) Officials could not get anyone in the government to authorize a construction halt and proceeded to pull down half the synagogue February 8. They informed the Rabbi the remainder of the

synagogue would be torn down in June.

13. (SBU) The American citizen has documented the Rabbi's account of meetings with government officials. On January 11 Deputy Prime Minister Asadullo Ghulomov met with Rabbi Abdurahmonov and told him that he would speak to President Rahmonov on this issue and that the government would build a new synagogue for the Jewish community. One month later, Ghulomov rescinded, citing separation of state and religion and called the synagogue an "appendix"-unnecessary and easily removable. Around the same time as Ghulomov's meeting in January, the local district government asked Abdurahmonov for the synagogue's charter, his personal biography, and two photos. The Rabbi never provided the information.

14. (SBU) On February 22 the Rabbi will meet with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law to obtain a lawyer and seek legal advice. The synagogue hopes that a lawyer will be able to assist in formally dealing with the government and reach an agreement on fair compensation, which would include land located in the center, or very near the center, of Dushanbe and an actual building where the synagogue and soup kitchen can operate. (COMMENT: A central location is essential for the community because most of the members are elderly and live in the immediate area, and because the community observes Orthodox practices and does not use transportation on the Sabbath. END COMMENT.) The Tajik government has offered the synagogue a new piece of land which is not near the center of town and not easily accessible to the elderly Jewish community and those who utilize the soup kitchen. In addition, the Rabbi believes the synagogue may have a legal case because he claims the Tajik government did not present the necessary demolition documentation and permits to the synagogue prior to February 8.

15. (SBU) On February 8, the General Prosecutor attempted to get the Rabbi to shake on a gentleman's agreement to accept the new plot of land. The Rabbi refused and threatened to go to the

DUSHANBE 00000329 002.2 OF 002

media, but has refrained from making his case public. He claims that he will approach local news agencies on February 26 after hearing from Koen Davydov, an expatriate Tajik-Jew currently in Israel, whom he believes may have a solution to the problem. (NOTE: Davydov has not been able to come up with a solution to the problem for years now. In fact, he has not appeared very engaged or interested, even when the Ambassador asked him in October 2005 to mobilize his contacts and resources to help the Dushanbe community. When asked why he had not done so previously, he answered, "No one asked." END NOTE.)

16. (SBU) In an attempt to rally support, the American citizen has released this news to a few agencies which have published short anonymous articles. He is trying to spread the news on a number of internet websites. In addition, the American citizen has talked with other expats in Dushanbe and they are attempting to raise funds locally and abroad to go towards the purchase or construction of a new building and general support for the synagogue.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the destruction of the synagogue is regretful, this is not a religious freedom issue or an example of anti-Semitism, but rather a land dispute. The Tajik government is an equal-opportunity demolisher and has torn down other structures around the synagogue as well - including the old headquarters and barracks of the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division - to clear the way for the "national park" surrounding the new Presidential Palace. Unfortunately, the Jewish expats Rabbi Abdurahmonov have been relying on for help have been unable to find a solution to the problem, and he himself, during the three years we have tried to get him to be pro-active, has simply said he won't move. The only option he has now is to try to negotiate fair compensation, but it's rather late in the game for that. We expect the Tashkent-based Rabbi David Gurevitch to make this an international issue, which he has tried to do in the past. The Embassy has been fully engaged on this issue for years, trying

to interest the Israeli Embassy in Tashkent, Davydov and his ex-Tajikistan compatriots in Israel, the Bokharan Jewish community in New York, and U.S. Jewish organizations in the U.S. with interests in the former Soviet Union. While all have expressed varying degrees of restrained sympathy, we have seen no attempt to help. If the story goes international, which it surely will, and if the Embassy is requested to comment, we say we have long followed the developing story, are convinced anti-Semitism is not involved, and advocate fair financial compensation from the city. In the end, the tragedy is not the land-grab by the city - it's the passivity of the communities that long knew this was coming. END COMMENT.
HOAGLAND